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THE CONSEQUENCES OF VARIOUS STRATEGIES REGARDING ADOLESCENT ABORTION

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DISCUSSION PAPER 13

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The Consequences of Various Strategies Regarding Adolescent Abortion

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February 1988

The Supreme Court decision on January 28, 1988 which struck down Canadian abortion legislation has focused attention on the question of unwanted pregnancies. The social sciences cannot offer evidence that resolves the moral issues. However, there is evidence on the impact of different strategies for responding to the situation. In the days to come the moral debate will continue, but policy makers are obligated to look at the consequences of policies that will be adopted in the near future. This short essay summarizes the findings from two books which review different aspects of the abortion issue.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS OF ADOLESCENT ABORTION

The first book is the report of the interdivisional committee on adolescent abortion of the American Psychological Association.[1] While this book will not necessarily change the opinions of those with certain convictions, it does summarize evidence that the public should know. For example, some people fear that teenagers will simply use abortion as a method of contraception. Studies in the U. S., however, show that a teenager who gives birth to an unwanted child is *more* likely to get pregnant a second time than a teenager who gets an abortion. This fact may arise from racial and social class differences which influence the incidence of abortion. Thus, one cannot automatically assume that increased availability of abortion for teenage females will reduce unwanted second pregnancies. However, the Scandinavian experience suggests that abortion reduces the likelihood that the girl will be trapped in a cycle of repeated pregnancies and minimal prospects of escaping the welfare subculture.

There is agreement in the book that policies restricting the availability of abortion increase the hardships for females who are young, poor, and members of minority groups. While pro–life advocates may feel that the suffering endured by this population is the lesser of the two evils, we must not minimize the social costs of such policies.

The chapters of this edited collection cover the assumptions that are typically made regarding abortion, the consequences of legislation, demographic characteristics of vulnerable girls, and pyschological issues. The editor, Gary

[1] Melton, Gary B. (ed.)(1986) *Adolescent Abortion: Psychological and Legal Issues*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press

Melton, has teamed up with Anita Pliner to prepare the introductory chapter. Four background papers follow with Nancy Felipe Russo emphasising epidemiology, Nancy E. Adler and Peggy Dolcini focusing on psychological issues, Jeanne Maracek noting the consequences of child bearing and abortion, and Elizabeth S. Scott closing the discussion with legal and ethical issues in counselling. The U.S. Supreme Court has made a number of decisions related to abortion by minors. These decisions take into account the dilemma of ordering the interests of the adolescent, her family, and the state. In trying to resolve some of these dilemmas, the courts have usually made certain questionable assumptions.

Three Questionable Assumptions

The first assumption influencing judges is that children are much more vulnerable than adults and are especially vulnerable to psychological harm arising from an abortion. This assumption is inconsistent with the argument that a serious infringement on the liberty of minors is a rather trivial matter for minors because, unlike adults, they are "always in some form of custody." Another inconsistency arises out of judicial inquiries intended to protect immature girls from harm. One effect of these procedures may be to subject juveniles to more anxiety, embarrassment, delay and a sense of violation than if the judicial review were not required. Thus, while emphasising the trauma for the adolescent allegedly caused because of the abortion decision, the courts tend to ignore the potential psychological and practical consequences of having to go before a judge.

A second assumption is that adolescents may not be mature enough to make a reasoned decision about an abortion. Although research in this area is limited, the evidence reviewed on consent to abortion gives no reason to doubt adolescents' competence to make decisions on the continuation of pregnancy.

A third assumption concerns the importance of having the parents know about the pregnancy. This assumption is based on an idyllic view of the family and the help parents provide during crises. While no one questions the desirability of sharing with supportive parents on such matters, the research on the communication between parents and adolescents gives reason to doubt the helpfulness of many parents in advising their children about decisions regarding pregnancy. In other words, the three basic assumptions underlying the laws and

their interpretation do not square with reality. While some aspects of the abortion issue involve morality, and are beyond the area of scientific research, this book assesses many of the assumptions that influence current policies on adolescent abortion.

The assumption of vulnerability. Let us first review the psychological evidence dealing with the first assumption: the unique vulnerability of teenagers if they have an abortion. The book argues that teenagers are no more likely than adult women to suffer complications as a result of abortion. In addition, the mortality rate from going ahead with a pregnancy is five times higher for teenagers than the mortality rate associated with adolescent abortion. There is also doubt about the assumption that the psychological effects of abortion are markedly more severe on adolescents than on adults. Although any decision to abort will be stressful, the modal response to abortion is one of relief, for both adolescent girls and adults. By contrast, a decision to give birth has many potential negative consequences. Adolescent parenthood typically results in lower educational attainment, decreased ability to stay off public assistance, and if the girl marries, the likelihood of an unstable marriage.

Another consequence of making teenage abortions difficult to obtain is that the unwanted children themselves become the victims. Although the research differs somewhat, unwanted children experience a higher incidence of referrals for mental health services, low educational attainment, and high maternal emotional rejection. Being unwanted during an early pregnancy constitutes a risk for the future life of the child.

The assumption of competence. The research on the competence of adolescents, compared with adult women in decision making about abortion, shows that adolescents do not differ from adults in their ability to understand the alternatives. They were, however, more likely than adults to perceive that their decision was determined by parental wishes and they were less likely to anticipate consultation with a professional about the decision. It is interesting that we automatically assume that age is related to good judgement, but evidence on cigarette-smoking doctors suggests that neither age nor education guarantee wise decision making.

Competence and maturity are difficult to assess since the same behaviour can be viewed as indicating different things. Some regard any minor who becomes pregnant as "immature," while others perceive any unmarried

pregnant teenager who seeks an abortion as demonstrating a "mature" response to the situation. However, comparisons between adolescents who abort and those who give birth show that those who abort display more adaptive and healthier personality functioning. They also seem to become more effective users of contraceptive methods than those who give birth; this, in turn, reduces the number of unwanted children in the future.

The assumption of parental support and the right to know. The third assumption, that the involvement of parents in the decision will usually be helpful, is appropriate when adolescents feel supported by their parents in their right to make a decision. A pregnant adolescent sometimes over estimates the negative reaction of her parents. The perception of probable hostile reactions from their parents can increase the delay in seeking medical attention if parental notification were required. Delay in seeking abortion substantially increases the medical and psychological risks associated with abortion. Unfortunately, the contemporary reality of family life suggests that sexuality is usually not a comfortable topic for parents and daughters. The other side of the coin is that maintaining privacy may be an important aspect of individuation, a principle developmental task of adolescence. While it is unfortunate that some adolescents cut themselves off from family support, the authorities tend to ignore completely the need adolescents have for privacy.

The Consequences of Current Legislation

The issue of the parents right to know is currently being debated with some vigor. There is a tragic irony in that requiring parental notification may actually increase the medical and psychological risks for minors by increasing the likelihood of delay as well as inhibiting a more reasoned weighing of the alternatives. In the U.S. a number of states have enacted parental notification or consent statutes that provide the option of "bypassing" parents and seeking approval for an abortion from a judge. If the judge finds the girl to be mature, her privacy must be respected. If she is immature, the judge must determine whether an abortion would be in her best interests. In practice these proceedings have been a ritual supporting the decision of the minor. It is not surprising that an abortion is usually seen to be in the best interests of adolescent girls. It is also difficult to imagine an adolescent too immature to make the decision regarding an abortion but mature enough to rear a child. The same dilemma applies to adoption. Is an adolescent mature enough to make such a decision? If

adoption is seen as a solution, we must accept the reality that the majority of teenagers do NOT give up their children for adoption.

Who is in a position to make the wisest decision in this area and who has the RIGHT to make the decision? Therapeutic abortion committees, which will be discussed later, seem to increase the problem partially by creating delay. Judges may understand the law, but they may not be qualified to assess the consequences of their decisions. It is unlikely that judges will force girls to have abortions against their will, but the wisdom of forcing a girl to give birth against her will could be questioned. One author viewed the opinion of a judge's writing in the *Bellotti Case* as "a high water mark of judicial arrogance," demonstrating "unwarranted confidence in the ability of judges to make sound decisions on behalf of individual pregnant minors, and to make sound policy for our society as a whole" (Mnookin, 1985:262-263). Not surprisingly, the authors recommend a wide range of counseling and then support for the girl for either decision.

This book focuses on the United States, ignoring the therapeutic abortion committees in Canadian hospitals which offer excellent illustrations of bureaucratic activities that add to the suffering of pregnant adolescents. Such committees became the political battleground for pro-life and pro-choice elements. The very existence of these committees reflects many of the issues discussed above. The evidence presented by the authors would suggest that Canadian therapeutic abortion committees have exacerbated the problem. If the Morgentaler decision leads to the end of these therapeutic abortion committees it would be an important accomplishment.

Demographic Characteristics of Adolescent Abortion

The chapter by Nancy Felipe Russo calls attention to some demographic characteristics. The younger the adolescents, the greater is the racial difference in abortion rate. For black teenagers below the age of 15, the abortion rate for 1978 was five times higher than among whites. Although it is difficult to summarize the appropriate research, the negative consequences of giving birth at an early age seem to be much greater for black girls. Bureaucratic barriers to abortion will increase the likelihood that disadvantaged groups will remain deprived in the next generation. Since younger girls tend to delay their abortions more than older women, the delay increases the medical risks for this younger group. Thus, black adolescent girls constitute a logical target population for

policy makers. They are at greater risk than the rest of the population.

Do these generalizations fit the native population of Canada? While some details will differ, the expression "legal abortion for the rich and wire coat hangers for the poor" conveys in a crude manner the different risks faced by the disadvantaged portion of the population when faced with bureaucratic barriers.

In Table 2 of her chapter, Russo compares abortion rates for several western countries. For females under 15 years the abortion rate per 100 known pregnancies was 41.7 for the United States, 46.5 for Canada, 60.6 for England and Wales, 85.7 for Norway and 87.8 for Sweden. In the U.S. and Canada the system leads to the majority of pregnant adolescents under 15 facing the burden of an unwanted child. The Scandinavian countries have consciously attempted to reduce the number of young girls in that situation. Those opposed to abortion might argue that the problem could be solved if young girls would give up their children for adoption. However, this is not the case for most of the minority females, particularly those from black families in lower class areas where young motherhood is more common. Applying these findings to Canada is not easy, but the assumption that teenagers will give their children up for adoption should be seriously examined.

A related finding is that unmarried teenagers whose first pregnancy ended in abortion were only *half* as likely to become pregnant a second time within 24 months as those unmarried teenagers whose first pregnancy resulted in a live birth. The result leads to a compounding of the problem. The most disadvantaged face the greatest delays, incur the greatest medical risks, and as a consequence will produce more children who are most likely to suffer.

There is an obvious political element that is frequently ignored. In the U. S., *black females* are the ones most affected. How many black females are involved in policy-making? In Canada, how many native females sit on therapeutic abortion committees?

Psychological Issues

Compared to older women, adolescents are slower to consider the possibility that they are pregnant, are less certain as to where they can turn for help, and take more time arriving at a decision. For those who terminate their

pregnancies, an early decision seems to have great physical and psychological advantages. Compared with adults, adolescents were more likely to see their decision as externally "compelled." Another study questions the assumption that girls would feel less guilt if they gave birth to the child and gave it up for adoption. It indicated that those who chose abortion showed a better adjustment and felt less negative about their experience than those who gave up their babies for adoption. Since few teenagers choose to place their babies for adoption, the reality is that these babies will be born into situations that put them at a disadvantage in life.

This book touches only briefly on the few benefits of an illegitimate birth. In some situations, the sharing of a baby's care may produce greater closeness between parents, especially mothers, and daughter. Short and Strodteck (1965) point out that in some lower-class urban areas, the change of role from adolescent to unmarried mother leads to a source of income and a certain degree of independence and status. It is sad to realize, however, that we have created a subculture of poverty and welfare which offers so little hope for the future that an illegitimate birth can be viewed as a way of improving one's situation.

Not surprisingly, the psychologically oriented authors of this book favor counselling. However, even those sociologically oriented scholars, who are less convinced of the effectiveness of counselling, would probably agree with the obvious implications of most of this research: minors would be better served if they could get advice early from a number of sources and receive support for the final decision, regardless of their choice. If abortion were the chosen alternative, the operation should be completed early rather than late. Unfortunately, the policy of the Reagan administration has been to provide few grants for abortion-related research and counselling services. This will probably hamper efforts to help pregnant adolescents make careful decisions.

This book has clear policy implications. Some of the hazards surrounding adolescent abortion are related to delays in the decision process. There is little evidence that the legal procedures related to restrictions on the adolescent's right to privacy and access to information and service have any benefit at all. While one could clearly wish for wise and sympathetic parents and a supportive and efficient counselling and medical system, the society would clearly be better served if pregnant adolescents could be given extensive support: the type of support that would minimize their anxiety and let them reach a decision early. Whatever decision is made by the girl, both medical and psychological support

with a minimum of delay seems to minimize the costs to the individuals concerned and to the society as a whole. If one is primarily concerned about the welfare of the adolescent, the evidence is reasonably clear. If the issue is the traditional rights of parents over their children regardless of the welfare of the adolescent, it is outside the realm of science. There is also society's legitimate concern for the rights of the unborn. While science is a tool to aid decision making, it is not the *only* basis for making policy decisions. This collection of writings may be able to assist in understanding the consequences of certain policies.

ADOLESCENT ABORTIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The second book to be summarized reviews policies toward adolescent abortions, family planning and the rights of minors in other countries.[1] How much authority for decision-making should society turn over to adolescents during this period? Although in some societies children may pass from childhood to adulthood through clearly defined and organized rituals, this is less so in European and North American societies. Thus, we face a basic policy issue concerning how to structure minors' decisions and parental involvement. Looking at policies and practices in other countries is an important step even though it is unclear whether innovative or efficient policies from one country can be adopted by another.

It is not surprising that the various authors in this book approach the topic from a variety of perspectives. The resulting unevenness is probably inevitable, and it is difficult to say whether the lack of clarity arises from the confusing picture which exists in many countries or if the authors have had difficulty developing a clear presentation. Another problem arises because of the variety which exists *within* the various countries. For example, in Italy the law in Liguria seems to be different from the law in Basilicata. There are also differences in practices with abortion rates in 1979 varying from 658 per 1000 births in one region to 77 in others. Of course, the validity of data gathering and comparability within a country could also be questioned. When one attempts to compare such data from one country to another, there is even more reason to be cautious. However, some of the chapters do suggest certain trends which are

[1] Rodman, Hyman and Jan Trost (eds.)(1986) *The Adolescent Dilemma*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.

supported by reasonable data. Despite the difficulty of correctly interpreting data from other countries, the authors are to be commended for assembling and attempting to compare such cross cultural information. Canadian policy makers would be well advised to learn what has happened elsewhere to see what route this country should follow.

Denmark and Sweden

Some scholars would point to Denmark and Sweden as illustrations of societies that have adapted the laws to the reality of local customs, thus minimizing the damage to people's lives as illustrated by practices in countries such as the United States and Canada. For example, illegally induced abortion has virtually disappeared. In Denmark, the fear that abortion might be used as an alternative to contraception, especially by the very young, seems to be unfounded. After an initial increase in the range of legal abortions, due to conversion of illegal to legal abortion, the general rate has declined steadily in Denmark since 1975.

A woman who is resident of Denmark may, at no cost to herself, have an abortion on condition that it be done prior to the 12th week of pregnancy. After 12 weeks one of several conditions must be met. About 5% of the abortions among minors occur after the 12th week; among adults it is about 2.5%. The woman must also be informed of the availability of assistance to complete the pregnancy and to give birth instead of aborting. If she is married, her husband's consent is not necessary.

In the 1980s there was a decrease in the number of births as well as abortions in Denmark. Whether this was due to reduced sexual activity or more effective contraceptive behaviour is difficult to determine.

Any society must be concerned about the numbers of children born to unmarried adolescents. In this regard Sweden has done better than many countries. Not only are few children born to minors in Sweden today, but since 1959 the birth rates among teenagers have decreased more than among adults. Mothers under 16 gave birth to 1.4 percent of all children born in 1959 and .08 percent in 1979.

Like Denmark, legal abortion rates in Sweden increased considerably until 1975 and then decreased considerably. In the 1950s and 1960s illegal abortions were much more common but very few are performed today.

The abortion law in force in Sweden between 1938 and 1975 required parental consent before a girl under 15 could receive and abortion; but during the latter years of the law, parental consent was rarely required if the girl did not want to have her parents involved. The physicians interpreted the "special circumstances" provision broadly. Today, one can argue that in Sweden women have the right to make these decisions.

Obviously, the experience in Sweden and Denmark will not be considered a better way to respond to the issue by everyone; but if one focuses on the *consequences* of leaving such decisions in the hands of the women affected, the Scandinavian approach seems to reduce human misery.

Belgium, Ireland, and Italy — Catholic Countries with Anti-abortion Traditions

At the time this chapter was prepared abortion and the distribution of information on abortion was illegal. However, the practice in Belgium seems to be heavily influenced by the availability of abortion in the Netherlands or Great Britain. It is somewhat surprising that the frequency of abortion in young women (about 1 per 2 births) is so high, since the attitudes tend to be more opposed to abortion in Belgium than in most other Northern European countries. In 1973, 54 percent of the Belgium population rejected the legalization of abortion for other than medical reasons and the proportion who rejected abortion for minors was 41 percent. Thus, attitudes do not seem to be a particularly good indicator of actual behaviour. An Edmonton study of public opinion and the legalization of abortion suggests that there is a complex relationship between opinions held by different portions of the society and ongoing practices (Hartnagel, Creechan, and Silverman, 1985). Belgium offers an illustration of a society which has, in practice, permitted a portion of the population to obtain abortions despite many who disapprove. The Edmonton study suggests a similar division in public opinion, but we do not have a neighbor like the Netherlands which might relieve pressures from groups expressing contrary views.

Another Catholic country, Ireland, may illustrate a closer link between attitudes, laws, and practices. The rate of illegitimacy in Ireland has always been low, relative to other countries, even though marriage was late by international standards. Pregnancy outside of marriage was considered to be a shameful matter to the girl and her family. A 1977 study found that pre-marital sex was regarded as "always wrong" by 71 percent of a national sample of the adult population. Ireland differs from other European societies in terms of higher levels of permanent celibacy, a later age for marriage, and restricted pre-marital intercourse. Abortion has been illegal in Ireland since 1861, a law which still seems to have general acceptance. However, women seeking abortions have their pregnancies terminated in the United Kingdom and incur no penalty when they return to Ireland. Recent changes have taken place in family planning and in the availability of contraceptive devices. Numbers on abortions have been available only since 1969. They show a steep rise from 122 abortions in 1969 to 3,700 in 1983. One author writes that Irish terminations now exceed illegitimate births at all ages after 19 but are still considerably below those in England.

Ireland is unique in its extreme use of postponed marriages and permanent celibacy. Making contraceptives available to adults is not very popular, and making them available to minors would be almost unthinkable. However, attitudes in the 1960's regarding the age of marriage and toward celibacy until marriage have been changing, particularly in the urban areas.

Italy is another society that has been moving from a traditional family model, with authority vested in the father, toward a greater recognition of the rights of women and minors. The establishment of eighteen, rather than twenty-one, as the age of legal maturity has not necessarily brought about consistency. A girl or boy can *marry* before the age of sixteen; but if the same young people engage in sex outside of marriage, one partner becomes guilty of corrrupting a minor. In addition, the same boy or girl with a paying job at the age of fifteen or sixteen cannot reside outside the family without the father's permission. This type of inconsistency is not rare in many western countries.

The Italian situation also illustrates how formal systems, such as the courts, adapt to the laws in a variety of ways. For example, a judge may authorize an abortion for a minor when "serious reasons" make parental authorization unobtainable or requesting it seems to be inadvisable. Judges interpret the law in many ways, but many interpret the minor's right to abort

as broadly as possible in order to avoid the possibility of an illegal abortion if the request were to be denied.

Although the chapter on Italy is less clear than some of the others, it closes with two case studies which show how agencies acting within the same legal framework and culture can have different impacts on pregnant adolescents. In one case a girl was weighing the decision regarding an abortion with the help of a family consultation centre through the juvenile court. It was a delicate moment in her relations with her family. They had recently been more accepting of her, and she feared that if they learned of her pregnancy they might reject her again. The judge authorized an abortion without parental notification and the procedural complications were minimal. All of the steps were completed in a relatively short time. This case illustrates that judges and others in crucial positions can interpret the laws to make them more humane.

The second case was very different in its outcome. A girl and her father wished an abortion, but the religious institution which was providing support for the daughter gave the father an ultimatum: if he consented to the abortion, they would no longer look after his daughter. The girl was persuaded to have the baby against her will, and the delivery was extremely traumatic.

While these two Italian cases are anecdotal, they illustrate a continuing argument made by both of these books: *The authors feel that there are distinct advantages to respecting the decisions made by the minors themselves.*

Abortion Committees in Canada and Czechoslovakia

While the Supreme Court decision in the Morgentaler case may make some of this information of historical interest, the chapter on Canada focuses on the province of Ontario. Since there are variations across the country, focusing on the largest province alone contributed to the clarity of this chapter. For convenience, this paper will discuss the situation as if the legislation had not been declared unconstitutional. Both Canada and Czechoslovakia have special committees to make decisions regarding abortion. In Canada, induced abortion cannot be legally performed unless several conditions are met. This includes approval by a therapeutic abortion committee set up by the board of the hospital. While the law is somewhat unclear on the matter, in practice, most hospitals require the consent of the parent when a therapeutic abortion is to be

performed on an unmarried minor of any age. It is worth noting that there is considerable debate over this issue if the girl is 17 or 13. In practice a 17 year old would be more likely to get permission without parental consent than a 13 year old.

Although there is no known legal requirement in the case of a married woman for the consent of her husband to a therapeutic abortion, more than two-thirds of the hospitals surveyed required the husband's consent. In the case of an adult woman who had never married, *it required the consent of the women's father*, even though there was no legal requirement for such a step. The Canadian situation illustrates again the discrepancy between law and practice as well as traditional adherence to norms reflecting male dominance.

Although a minor has the right to consent to an abortion, she may be denied access by a restrictive abortion committee policy or by the lack of such a committee at the hospital in her community. This supports a common theme running through many of these chapters. Depending on wealth, local conditions, and practices of various agencies, juveniles receive differential treatment in many countries regardless of their legal rights. The poorest and those with the greatest family problems get the least amount of help. One could easily conclude that the therapeutic abortion committees in Canada, like the courts in the United States and elsewhere, create opportunities for delay and degradation with little evidence that they make a contribution.

It is interesting to note that in 1981 in Ontario, 2,274 children were born out of wedlock to minors. A further 4,069 women under 18 had abortions that year. Comparing the 8.6 million people in Ontario with approximately 10 million in Belgium, we see that about 5,000 Belgian women (15–19) underwent abortion in 1977, approximately 1 abortion per 2 births in this age group. These figures may be difficult to compare since the births would include those born to married women in Belgium, but it is interesting to note that the abortion rate is somewhat comparable in a country where it is illegal (Belgium) and in a province where it is legal but difficult (Ontario). Again, practices are hard to predict even with information on legislation and attitudes.

In this survey of countries, Czechoslovakia appears to be the only other country which utilizes abortion committees. I feel it is unlikely that the strategies and goals of the Czechoslovakian government are comparable to the issues facing Canada. Therefore, I shall let readers consult the book for further

information concerning that country.

Generalizations from the World Scene

Additional chapters on Spain, France, Denmark, Hungary, and United States contained insights, but the reader should be wary of making comparisons from one country to another. For example, Jozan states that in Hungary "discrimination against children born out of wedlock no longer exists" (p. 99). In most western countries, that is also probably true according to the law. However, it would generally be a mistake to assume that illegitimate children will have the advantages of those born in wedlock. The difficulties that arise when broad generalizations are attempted is illustrated by the chapter on the World Health Organization. This chapter focuses primarily on a survey of nations regarding their attitudes and practices toward sex education and other family planning practices. When I think of the Canadian scene, I have trouble imagining which government agency or civil servant would be able to complete such a survey on behalf of my country. There might be considerable debate regarding the correct response to each question. In some respect this World Health Organization survey illustrates the almost impossible task of generalizing and oversimplifying certain characteristics of national family planning.

One must also be cautious about using abortion policies to achieve other objectives. For example, policy-makers in Rumania, in the early 1960s, considered the fertility rate to be too low. The abortion law became very restrictive to increase the supply of babies. The legal abortion rate decreased, of course, but the abortion related death rate increased tremendously—from 15 to 95 per 1 million women. The increase was due to illegal abortions.

In their concluding chapter, Rodman and Trost try to place national programs on something of a continuum. They point out that Czechoslovakia, Denmark and Sweden have had programs for the dissemination of information on sexuality and contraception for some time. (Sweden began providing sex education in the schools in the mid-1940s and it became compulsory in the 1950s.) On the other end of the continuum they place Ireland and the United States. With regard to abortions, the continuum is somewhat different. They classify Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Hungary, Sweden, and the U.S. as liberal. Canada, France, and Italy are viewed as moderate with Belgium, Ireland and Spain as being conservative since abortion was illegal until very recently.

Rodman and Trost anticipated a challenge from readers on these classifications since Beligium makes use of the availability of abortion in Holland and England despite the legal prohibition. In addition, abortions are more readily available in Canada than in Italy and some would argue that the U.S. should be viewed as moderate rather than liberal because of restrictions in some states and because of actual or threatened restrictions at the Federal level. However, the use of science requires that one try to make such generalizations, even if experts in the field disagree on some of them.

THE EMERGING CONCLUSIONS

As one searches for an intelligent policy regarding family planning, it is quite clear that women bear the bulk of the burden, whether they are married or not. However, the people who make the major decisions in terms of policy, in the courts, or on therapeutic abortion committees, tend to be old, white, male, and well-off. Is it just, or even sensible, to have these portions of the population dominating decision making in these areas? Perhaps it should be required that the decision makers must include those who are young, black, female, and poor.

Although scientific knowledge does not always lead to clear directions for policy, Rodman and Trost point out that there are clear advantages to helping adolescents make their own decisions regarding family planning. Consultation with parents, other adults, or professional counsellors on a *voluntary* rather than compulsory basis takes into account the realities that many adolescents and their parents have difficulty discussing some of these matters.

These books deal with an issue where there is some correspondence between evidence and desired social action. I share the opinion of these editors that the legal and bureaucratic procedures influencing abortion and family practices in Canada and the United States harm individuals and society. It is also clear that the positions that arise from this book place a lower priority on the rights of unborn fetuses. While right-to-life groups will not share the conclusions that arise from these two books, they must accept the reality that the imposition of their views would lead to much suffering and heavy social cost.

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ISSN: 0824-5134

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